



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
**U.S. Department  
of the Interior**

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## News Release

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### **Two Generations of Interior, BLM Leadership Mark 15th Anniversary of National Conservation Lands System: Celebration Honors Pioneers of BLM's Conservation Efforts, Points to Future**

SHELTER COVE, Calif. – U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell along with Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management Janice Schneider and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Director Neil Kornze gathered today with former Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and key conservation and community leaders to commemorate the 15th anniversary of BLM's National Conservation Lands, a system that conserves, protects and restores nationally significant landscapes.

Today's event at the King Range National Conservation Area brought together key leaders who helped shape BLM's legacy of conservation. Former DOI Solicitor John Leshy, former BLM Director Tom Fry and Conservation Lands Foundation Chairman Ed Norton were also on hand to mark the occasion. As Secretary of the Interior in 2000, Babbitt established the National Conservation Lands system. Leshy and Norton were key advisors in the creation of BLM's conservation system and Fry was the BLM director who helped establish the land management program for treasured landscapes as part of the 245 million acres of public lands the BLM manages.

"The conservation mission of the Bureau of Land Management has roots deep in the bureau's history, but the actions taken by then-Secretary Babbitt were truly transformative," said Jewell. "For the first time, the BLM had a conservation system of its own and a clear directive to manage these special landscapes under common standards and with a common purpose. Today, we celebrate that legacy."

The National Conservation Lands contain some of the West's most spectacular landscapes, including 872 congressional and presidentially protected areas. This includes more than 30 million acres of National Monuments, National Conservation Areas, Wilderness Areas, Wilderness Study Areas, and Conservation Lands of the California Desert, as well as 8,000 miles of Wild and Scenic Rivers and National Scenic and Historic Trails.

Since its founding 15 years ago, the National Conservation Lands system has served an important role as part of the Department's conservation portfolio. Since 2000, approximately two-thirds of all lands set aside by Congress as wilderness have been BLM-managed lands. Of the 16 National Monuments designated by President Obama, six have been created as part of BLM's National Conservation Lands.

To mark the milestone of the 15th anniversary, Jewell and Babbitt unveiled a commemorative walkway at the King Range NCA, which was the first unit of the system and the beginning of the National Conservation Lands. The walkway overlooks the scenic Black Sands Beach area and features tiles that

represent the unique characteristics and beauty of many of the units of the National Conservation Lands nationwide.

“The BLM is proud to be at the forefront of conservation in this country,” said Kornze. “As the West continues to grow and demand more areas to hike, hunt, and fish, the BLM is poised to provide those experiences in new and engaging ways. Conservation and recreation will play an increasingly important role in this great agency's future.”

As part of today's celebration, Kornze announced the BLM's new interactive recreational maps. The new maps, available for 42 National Conservation Lands units, provide interactive navigability for BLM recreation sites and trails, along with photos and site-specific information. More maps will be added in the weeks and months to come.

About 60 million visitors recreate each year on BLM-managed lands, and nearly one-third of these visits are on National Conservation Lands. For the first time, visitors to BLM lands will be able to customize the information they retrieve about specific areas and access it either by printing it or accessing it on mobile devices or desktops. The new maps will improve a visitor's experience by providing helpful information and eye-catching visual images of recreational opportunities.

Earlier in the week, a celebration highlighting the vision and efforts to establish the National Conservation Lands took place at the Headwaters Forest Reserve near Fortuna, California. The celebration included the planting of a “Visionary Grove” of redwood trees, a living commemoration to community members and leaders who worked to acquire the Headwaters Forest for conservation. Youth from the California Conservation Corps and local elementary school also took part in the celebration.

“Inspiring the next generation of conservation leaders is how we ensure that these places are cared about and cared for by the next generation,” said BLM California State Director Jim Kenna. “The BLM is committed to engaging young people in hands-on stewardship to the land, and today's event is a great example of the sort of local partnerships we have across California that make that happen.”

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